Developing a Comprehensive Framework for Conflict Analysis: Sources, Situation, Attitudes, Group Maintenance, Escalation (SSAGE)

Cathryn Quantic Thurston, Ph.D.
The RAND Corporation
Thurston@rand.org

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Abstract: This paper reports on the author's attempt to develop a comprehensive, dynamic framework for conflict analysis. The proposed framework aims to elevate the study of conflict analysis in and of itself, synthesizing the various frameworks, theories, and models used in a wide range of academic research on international conflict into a practical framework for categorizing key conflict analysis tools. This paper organizes the key categories of conflict analysis by Sources, Situation, Attitudes, Group Maintenance, and Escalation (SSAGE). Within each category, the framework details the most useful models, describes their theoretical origins and describes how they are used in practice. The paper uses examples of international conflict to illustrate the major points.

Introduction

This paper springs from the author's personal frustration in choosing texts for her course *conflict analysis for peace operations* in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University. There is no single textbook that includes a thorough discussion of conflict analysis frameworks and models at the individual, community, and international level. There are textbooks for one level or another, or that focus on a particular theory (such as communications or social-psychology) or approach (such as John Paul Lederach's work). But there is no single source that reviews the major theories and associated models or that is organized by a concise framework with concrete examples of how models are actually used to analyze complex conflicts.

While nearly all international conflict resolution texts contain an overview of some basic elements of conflict analysis, even the most popular (Ramsbotham, et al., 2006; Pruitt and Kim, 2004; Kriesberg, 2003; Mitchell, 1981) tend to spend more print on the resolution of conflict. This lop-sided view discounts the work that is needed in improving our analysis of conflict, which is critical to the success of any attempt at resolution. There are one or two useful workbooks for international practitioners, such as Fisher et al's (2000) *Working with Conflict*, but again, the time spent on conflict analysis is much less than the space devoted to intervention options.

This paper outlines an approach developed by the author over four semesters teaching conflict analysis to graduate students in the Peace Operations Policy Program in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University. The approach outlined here aims to help elevate the study of conflict analysis in and of itself and present a practical

framework for categorizing key conflict analysis tools. The basic idea of this paper is that a deeper understanding of, and ability to decipher the underlying sources, behaviors and attitudes that perpetuate destructive conflict are necessary before conflict resolution can take place.

Based on four semesters' worth of working with various conflict assessment frameworks and models, the author believes that it is possible to create a dynamic assessment framework that incorporates specific models for several basic categories of information. Over time the author collected about 130 different "models" that explain any number of conflict processes. Most models are static and describe only one element of a situation or interaction. However, a handful of models strive to describe the interactive nature of conflict, such as Pruitt and Kim's *Structural Change Model*. By taking the best of these models and using them to describe specific categories of information needed, a more robust conflict map can be created.

The author refined the design for the conflict analysis system with the help of students at George Mason University. The students in the Peace Operations Policy Program were ideal, because many had field experience working in conflict zones, but were not typically "experts" in conflict analysis. The program also draws students from the NGO community and military, the intelligence community and private contractors. There are also typically a couple international students in the class.

The students applied the frameworks and models to a wide range of conflicts. The students tracked a current international conflict for a group project, and they also analyzed a conflict at the interpersonal, community, and international levels on their own. Based on their observations in class and through reading their analyses, the author was

better able to understand how these frameworks and models work on a wide range of

conflicts at the individual, community, and international levels. The author then began to

systematically select the models that seemed to be the easiest to understand and use, as

well as the ones that were rooted most firmly in conflict theory on persistent social

conflict.

Using Frameworks and Models

Conflict can be complicated, and it is easy to forget key elements of conflict

analysis. It is disturbing, then, that more attention has not been paid to developing a

comprehensive framework beyond a set of simple heuristics or a set of questions. This

section synthesizes the best aspects of several frameworks into a comprehensive

framework called SSAGE (Sources, Situation, Attitudes, Group Maintenance, and

Escalation), which offers a practical, yet thorough, theory-based approach to organizing

information about conflict.

Conflict analysis can help at the interpersonal level, the community level, and the

international level. One very good conflict map for the interpersonal level is the Wilmot-

Hocker Conflict Assessment Guide (Wilmot and Hocker, 2007), which is based in part on

Wehr's Conflict Map (Wehr, 1979; Wilmot and Hocker, 2001). These maps were

developed to give the parties in conflict as well as the intervener a clearer understanding

of the conflict. Wehr's map was designed to capture the basic elements of all social

conflict.[1] The map consists of a summary description, conflict history, conflict context,

conflict parties, issues, dynamics (such as precipitating events, polarization) alternative

routes to solutions (such as formal plans or behavioral changes), and conflict regulation

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[1] Wehr, Paul. *Conflict Regulation*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979, p. 18

potential (such as internal and external limiting factors). The Hocker-Wilmot

Assessment Guide is focused primarily on interpersonal conflict, and updates Wehr's

map by building questions into each section.[2]   Two other recent frameworks also merit

special notice. One is Sandole's "Three Pillars" framework, which attempts to categorize

and define the information needed to understand the conflict itself (pillar one), the

conflict causes and conditions (pillar two) and the objectives of third party interveners

(Pillar Three).[3] Chris Mitchell's SPITCERO (Sources, Parties, Issues, Tactics, Changes,

Enlargement, Resources, Outcomes) framework is a useful mnemonic to help remember

the critical elements of any conflict analysis.[4] Sandole's work helps to build the universe

of required terms and categories for the analyst, while Mitchell's SPITCERO framework

helps the practitioner in the field quickly assess the conflict.

All of these frameworks outline the basic elements of any conflict at the

interpersonal, community, or international level and they are useful to create a baseline

for the conflict practitioner or researcher. Yet there are two main drawbacks to these

frameworks. First, they rely heavily on the user's prior knowledge of conflict processes,

and are therefore written more with the seasoned conflict analyst in mind. For example,

without a solid background in the many theoretical underpinnings of conflict analysis, it

would be difficult for anyone to answer the first question posed by Mitchell, "What do

the parties see as the sources of this conflict?" Most parties in conflict conflate goals and

issues, attitudes and behavior, with "sources" of conflict, and it is up to the conflict

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[2] Hocker, Joyce L. and William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict, Fourth Edition*, Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Communications, Inc., p.160

[3] Sandole, Dennis J.D. "Typology" in *Conflict*, Eds. Sandra Cheldelin, Daniel Druckman, and Larissa Fast, New York, NY: Continuum, 2003, p. 40

[4] Mitchell, Christopher, "How Much Do I Need to Know?" In John Paul Lederach and Janice Moomaw Jenner, Eds. *Into the Eye of the Storm: A handbook of international peacebuilding*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002, p. 54

resolution practitioner to help the parties "understand" the sources of conflict. Secondly, the maps are static and require frequent updating, but do not provide a path for creating a dynamic conflict assessment system.

The SSAGE Framework

The students found Wehr's conflict map and Mitchell's SPITCERO framework to be the easiest to use. However, Wehr's map was too long, and Mitchell's SPITCERO was not quite detailed enough. After working through the existing frameworks and models, I decided on the following necessary categories of analysis: *Sources* of conflict, the conflict *Situation*, conflict *Attitudes*, *Group maintenance*, and conflict *Escalation*. These categories make up the SSAGE Framework, which will be described below, along with major models used to describe conflict processes in each category.

SOURCES of CONFLICT

The theories surrounding the sources of conflict are the least well understood element of conflict analysis. Because the conflict analysis and resolution field has borrowed from a number of other fields, this section is also the most confusing to new conflict analysts. It is highly likely that anyone with a bachelor's degree will have encountered more than one theory on the source of conflict, but unlikely that they have encountered all. It is also just as likely that the student was taught one "correct" way to understand conflict. For example, Political Science and International Relations majors understand conflict through the lens of realism and interdependence theories, mostly rooted in an understanding of

power politics, whereas communications majors focus on systems and communication theory.

One particularly interesting model on the sources of conflict is Sandole's "Four Worlds" model of the perception-behavior nexus. [5] Sandole's framework focuses on the interaction of the individual with their surrounding environment, positing that everyone processes information from four main sources: The *External World* which includes the Natural World as well as Man-Made processes and systems and the *Internal World* of the individual, which includes the Mental World (beliefs, values and expectations) and the Biological/Physiological World (senses). This framework of theories helpful, if incomplete. For example, the "Four Worlds" do not really encompass power structures *per se*, but merely the individual's perception of those systems. Therefore, the author modified Sandole's basic idea by adding other major theories of the sources of conflict and arranging them so that they loosely fit with his framework. The modified framework is shown in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1: MAJOR THEORIES OF THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Sandole's framework centers on *social interaction* theories, which are probably the most widely used and cited theories for interpersonal and inter-group conflict, and *individual characteristics*. Figure 1 adds *situational* theories along the horizontal axis and *power* theories on the vertical axis. Power theories are commonly used to explain conflict at almost any level of society from interpersonal to international conflict.

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[5] Sandole, Dennis J.D., "Ch.14: Conflict Management: Elements of generic theory and process, in *Conflict Management and Problem Solving: Interpersonal to International Applications*, New York, NY: University Press, 1987, pp. 289-297

However, power theories are difficult to use because the term "power" is so hard to define, let alone quantify. Situation theory on the other hand tries to dynamically portray the relationship between the internal and external worlds. This theory removes the source of the conflict from the individual and describes behavior as a response to the situation at hand. Situation theory is especially compelling because it helps to explain how "normal" individuals and groups can behave differently depending on the situation (real and imagined) they find themselves in.

Structural/environmental theories undergird the other theories, laying the foundation for most conflict, even if it is not a main source. This category includes cultural, environmental, and economic theories of conflict.

This simple portrayal of the major sources of conflict helps the conflict analyst to remember and check their assumptions about why the conflict is occurring. It is easy to become used to, ignore, or misunderstand the different theories used to explain why a conflict is happening. Without a good understanding of the different explanations, the analyst may misunderstand fundamental sources of conflict and misinterpret basic facts. This can lead to misdiagnosis and wrong-headed suggestions to policymakers, which in turn can lead to bad decisions on intervention options. Finally, one theory cannot explain all sources of conflict. Therefore, reliance on one theory over another can hinder analysis of conflict. Even if one theory seems to explain the source of a conflict at one point in time, the changing nature of conflict may reveal additional or different sources of conflict as time goes on. Furthermore, conflict analysis tools are often derived from specific theories, so knowing the range of theories of sources of conflict will help inform frameworks and models used in the rest of the analysis.

The theories of the sources of conflict improve the understanding of the conflict, especially complex, deep-rooted conflict. Here the traditional political science approaches to understanding international conflict meet theories of communication and social interaction to provide a much fuller picture of the complexities involved. The Sources section of the SSAGE framework helps develop the context that underlies the other sections and models of the framework and can be revisited and updated after any of the following sections.

SITUATION

This section of the framework provides a more traditional analysis and relies most heavily on actual data collection. Table 1 provides a list of the models used in this section.

Table 1: Determining the Conflict Situation			
	Model	**Author(s)**	**Short Description**
Background and Context	timeline of both sides	Fisher, *et al*[6]	list important events and how perceived by each side
Parties to conflict	Interests and goals diagram	Thurston, Jeong	issues/interests are to be solved, goals/positions pursued
	TRIP Model of goals	Hocker and Wilmot	topic, relationship, identity, process
Conflict Styles and Tactics	Dual Concern Model	Pruitt and Kim	concern for own outcome vs. concern for other determines strategy (competing, avoiding, problem-solving, yielding)

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[6] Fisher, Simon, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, Jawed Ludin, Richard Smith, Steve Williams, and Sue Williams, *Working with Conflict: Skills and strategies for action*, London, UK: Zed Books, 2000, P.21

This section will briefly describe each model and how it is used for analysis. A useful first step in understanding the conflict situation is to develop a timeline of events, and then note each conflict party's perception of the importance of that event. One useful example of this type of exercise is found in Fisher, *et al* (2000). It is useful for the analyst to understand that events mean different things to different people, in addition to the historical underpinnings for conflict. For example, to an outsider, a settlement over land or resources may seem obvious, but to the participants, the conflict can often take on an emotional life of its own, which is revealed through an analysis not only of the events, but the parties' perception of what has occurred.

In addition to the basic history of a conflict, the conflict situation should be developed mainly from an analysis of the interests and goals of conflict groups. The diagram used to map this section is shown in Figure 2.[7]

INSERT FIGURE 2: GOALS and INTERESTS DIAGRAM

This diagram requires the analyst to identify the external parties to the conflict, including the major third party interveners, and lesser activists and advocates on either side. The main parties in conflict, as we have seen in real life, can be quite complicated. The main parties can have shifting internal factions and spoilers in addition to external advocates and allies, and it is helpful to know who's who, so that the change in the composition of the conflict parties can be mapped over time.

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[7] The Interests and Goals Diagram was modified from Ho Won Jeong's introductory class on conflict analysis at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

Likewise, the parties' goals can also change over time. The most helpful model I have found for understanding goals is Hocker and Wilmot's (2007) TRIP model, shown in Figure 3.

INSERT FIGURE 3: THE TRIP MODEL

The TRIP model works well because it is well grounded in interpersonal communication theory and research, and it highlights very well how goals can shift and change over time. This model includes four types of goals: Topical, Relational, Identity, and Process. Topical goals focus on issues and positions. Process goals discuss how the conflict will be solved. A good example of a process goal is the time spent in negotiations over the whether to hold "six party talks" or bilateral negotiations between the United States and North Korea over the latter's nuclear weapons program. North Korea insisted on bilateral talks with the United States, while the United States insisted on including South Korea, Russia, and China, among others. The conflict over different process goals stalled talks for the first six years of the George W. Bush's administration. Underlying these Topical and Process goals, argue Hocker and Wilmot, are two under-represented goals: Relational and Identity. The Relational goal focuses on how the two parties want to handle their relationship in the future, which is especially important in any type of social conflict including civil war, but also in international conflict, especially between neighboring countries. The Identity goal focuses on to what extent each party needs to "save face" during the conflict resolution process. Oftentimes the need for a

leader to "save face" with his or her constituents will make or break a conflict resolution process.

Finally, the last section of the conflict situation section is determining the behavior of the conflict parties. The most useful model is Pruitt and Kim's (2004) Dual Concern Model, shown in Figure 4.[8]

INSERT FIGURE 4: THE DUAL CONCERN MODEL

The Dual Concern Model is probably the most widely cited and researched model for determining which conflict strategy a party will use to pursue their goals.[9] Like the TRIP Model, the Dual Concern Model is derived from many years' worth of research in interpersonal communication. The four main conflict strategies are: competing/contending, yielding, avoiding, and problem-solving. The strategies are employed based on two main factors: a party's concern for its own outcomes, and a party's concern for the other's outcomes (hence the term "Dual Concern" model). Obviously, in a crisis that is escalating, the parties choose the contending strategy, but the other strategies are equally compelling based on the situation at hand. For example, avoiding behavior, also known as stalling, can be just as frustrating to parties in conflict as well as potential third party interveners. Therefore, knowing how a party is thinking

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[8] Pruitt, Dean G., and Sung Hee Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement, Third Edition*, New York, NY: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2004

[9] Pruitt and Kim have synthesized much of this model from years of research in interpersonal communications. For an extensive discussion of conflict styles, see also Folger, Joseph P., Marshall Scott Poole, and Randall K. Stutman, *Working Through Conflict: Strategies for relationships, groups, and organizations*, Fifth Edition, New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2004

about itself as well as its competitor is key to determining what strategy the party is most likely to pursue.

Taken together, the Perspectives Timeline, Interests and Goals Diagram, TRIP Goals, and the Dual Concern Model are useful in organizing and collecting specific data points that lead to a much greater understanding of a complex conflict. Furthermore, once these models are set up and populated with data, any analyst can continue to build on them to create a dynamic understanding of a conflict situation over time.

ATTITUDES

The Attitudes section of the SSAGE Framework focuses on the special individual and group level psychological and cognitive processes that occur during conflict. This is an important section, because most conflict analysis systems fail completely to take attitudes into account, (even though attitudes are talked about practically incessantly.)

A good starting point is Hocker and Wilmot's Lens Model, shown in Figure 5, which focuses on how conflict parties frame the conflict with images of self, other, and their relationship.[10]

INSERT FIGURE 5: THE LENS MODEL

The Lens Model simply asks three questions. First, "What is the conflict party's image of self?" Not surprisingly, the typical self image of a group in conflict usually follows a script of self-righteous, strong, moral, and justified victim-hood. Second,

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[10] Wilmot, William W., and Joyce L. Hocker, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 6th edition, Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2001, p. 27

"What is the Party's image of the "Other"? These "Other images" are more nuanced, but also follow some well worn patterns. For example, Chris Mitchell organizes images of the other into the following categories shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Enemy Images[11]	
Black-Top Image	They have evil leadership
"Pro Us" Illusion	Their people actually like us, but they are being manipulated by their evil leadership
Puppet Leadership	Even their leaders like us, really, they just are being manipulated by other leaders
Unified Enemy Image	"They" are all the same
Intruder Images	The enemy is an alien, or The enemy is among us

A party's image of the "Other" usually falls into one or more of these general categories and are easy to determine from party communiqués, statements from leadership, surveys of the population, etc.

Finally, the Lens Model poses a third question: "What is the Party's image of their relationship with the "Other"? This question is very interesting and can lead to important clues to each party's underlying issues and interests. Even though parties may live across the world, across a border, or in the same village, there is a relationship that a conflict party must consider, even if only to distort for their own benefit. For example, in the case of China and Taiwan, China sees Taiwan as an integral part of China, populated by Chinese. In China's eyes, there are no "Taiwanese." However, Taiwan sees their relationship with China in a totally different way, and believes that Taiwan's independence signifies their "equal" status with China. It is true that the conflict between China and Taiwan has all the hallmarks of a "typical" international conflict based on

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[11] Mitchell, Christopher R., *The Structure of International Conflict*, London, UK: MacMillan Press, Ltd, pp. 99 ff, 1981

power, but using the Lens Model to determine each party's image of their relationship

reveals a much more nuanced and deep-rooted conflict than is typically attributed to

China-Taiwan. Again, these attitudes are revealed in political statements, surveys, etc.

Culture and Gender

Depending on the level and complexity of the conflict, it may also be useful to

layer on top of the Lens Model an even more nuanced analysis of images and framing

based on cultural and/or gender differences. Culture and gender flow through conflict,

often under the radar of traditional conflict analysis, but each can have true and lasting

effects. This is especially true in community conflict, perhaps over economic, social

well-being, environment or resource conflicts, but can also have profound effects on civil

war and international conflict.

Culture, according to Avruch (1998), should be analyzed from a situated actor's

perspective, and should be focused on process, rather than patterns.[12] This focus on

process reinforces the overall approach of the SSAGE framework and re-emphasizes the

analysis of the conflict situation, (remember the Identity and Process goals of the TRIP

model), and also the analysis of conflict behavior, especially in using the Dual Concern

Model to determine conflict styles, tactics, and strategies.

A common way to analyze cultural differences and their effects is to focus on

"high context" and "low context" cultures. One writer who handles this distinction very

well is David Augsberger (1992), who draws extensively on his work as a missionary in

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[12] Avruch, Kevin. *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1998, p. 59

Africa.[13]   Augsberger explains the differences between people who come from a collectivist culture that honors the community over the individual (think Japanese culture) versus a more "western" (think American) culture that emphasizes the individual over the group. Obviously there are many nuances within this categorization, but it is important to note the basic differences and how it affects the conflict. The effect, as Avruch states, is mainly on the process chosen to conduct the conflict. If there is considerable difference between cultural understandings of the "ideational codes, schemas, metaphors, and cognitive models"[14] that make up the collective and the individual, then there will be considerable differences in each party's approach to waging conflict or negotiations, and consequently an increased chance for deep misunderstanding of each other's words and actions.

Another layer of analysis at the image level may require a gender critique. After all, women make up 50% of the population, and in countries that have experienced war, women usually make up a larger percentage. Studies have shown that women approach conflict differently than men, which can affect power structures in society when women's approaches to conflict resolution are undervalued. In particular, studies show that women rely on mutual interdependence to solve conflict rather than by wielding power over others. Women also tend to use mutual empathy as the basis for understanding and communicating. This difference results in a focus on problem solving that is more relational than separate, and more constructive than dominating.[15] Therefore, in addition to addressing typical women's issues (topical goals), when looking for potential conflict

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[13] Augsberger, David W. *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and patterns*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992
[14] Avruch, p. 57
[15] Hocker and Wilmot, 4th ed. P. 17

resolution partners, it may make sense to layer a gender analysis of the conflict over the framework in an effort to determine the attitudes and images of the conflict among women and men. This may open up possible alternative views of the conflict and with them, alternative approaches to conflict problem solving.

Psychological Analysis

Sometimes all the analysis in the world does not help to explain the bizarre views held of the other during conflict. At this point, it may be helpful to delve further into the cognitive elements and psychological effects of war. The analysis of conflict attitudes at this level does not require an understanding of individual and group level psychology above the bachelor's degree level. Therefore, it is entirely possible to bring a level of understanding of conflict psychology to any analysis effort.

This section of analysis relies heavily on theories of cognitive consistency. The goal of cognitive consistency is mental stress reduction, which, in times of conflict, will obviously come into play. Human brains work to reduce mental stress through selective perception and selective recall, shown in Table 3.[16]

Table 3: Elements of cognitive consistency (Mental stress reduction)	
Selective Perception	Rigid cognitive structure limits what a person sees. *Effect*: inability to empathize
stereotyping	Simplifying categories of groups of people
tunnel vision	Info overload leads to ignoring all information not perceived as directly related to the problem
separation	Failure to recognize good actions of opponent in order to keep them evil

[16] Mitchell, C.R., *The Structure of International Conflict*, London, UK: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1981, p. 71ff

bolstering	Seek info that bolsters view
polarization	Individuals internalize group values, over-identify with own group
Selective Recall	Rigid cognitive structure limits what a person remembers. *Effect*: can't understand why other party hates you
repression	unconsciously repress memory
suppression	conscious decision not to think about something

Again, sources of information to determine the level of cognitive "tricks" used in the conflict are shown through the writings, speeches, and decisions made by conflict party leaders, and in surveys and even popular culture of the general population.

Finally, any individual, community, nationality, or issue group is affected at the psychological level by conflict. The psychological effects of conflict and violence have been documented in many places,[17] but the lasting effects can best be described by the *fundamental attribution error* and the effects of *post-traumatic stress disorder* listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Psychological Effects of Conflict			
Effects of Cognitive Consistency	Fundamental Attribution Error	Hocker and Wilmot, Pruitt and Kim, Mitchell, etc.	enemy meant to do what they did, we did what we had to do
Effects of Violence	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	MacNair	affects those who perpetrate violence, who are victims of violence, and those who see it

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[17] An excellent book is, MacNair, Rachel M., *The Psychology of Peace: An Introduction*, City? Praeger Paperback, 2003

The fundamental attribution error, which has been tested extensively and successfully across cultures, is the effect of individuals and groups striving to maintain their own righteous self image at the expense of the enemy. As the brain attributes to the enemy all that is negative and bad, and attributes to the self (or group) all that is positive and good, the basic effect is to believe that the enemy has an extended area of operation, while your group does not. Thus, the self is "forced" into action, while the enemy has "chosen" to inflict pain. The fundamental attribution error clearly shows how perceptions in conflict easily fall into this psychological trap.

Another psychological effect is more basic and fundamental: that of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The disorder has been highlighted recently as the U.S. Army has struggled to define the condition and treat its victims returning from the war in Iraq. Not only is PTSD debilitating to the individual and his or her family, but it does not necessarily diminish over time and can also lead to more violence. Less is understood about PTSD effects at the group level, but some psychoanalysts, especially Vamik Volkan, see the effects of "group trauma" as having similar patterns and effects of PTSD at the group level.[18] Though the term "PTSD" can controversial, the debilitating psychological effects of war on individuals and communities cannot be overstated. It is important to understand at a minimum that the psychological effect of war can sustain a conflict even after the physical fighting ends.

The Attitudes section, beginning with the Lens Model, and moving through cultural and gender lenses, as well as cognitive consistency, fundamental attribution error and post-traumatic stress disorder, illustrates the importance of analyzing attitudes in

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[18] Volcan, Vamik D., *The Need for Enemies and Allies: From clinical practice to international relationships*, Jason Aronson Publishers, 1988 and *Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999

conflict. The models are derived from a variety of theories, including theories of the individual, systems, and situations. While the desire for economic and political power and specific tangible goals (such as territory) are often regarded as the primary drivers of communal and international conflict, the power of individual and group attitudes cannot be denied as a major contributor to the persistence of deep-rooted conflict.

This section also concludes the "data collection" portion of the conflict map. By now, the analyst should have a good baseline understanding of the basic elements of the conflict, including the different perceptions of major events, the probable underlying sources of conflict, the basic situation, conflict attitudes, and choice conflict behaviors of the major parties.

GROUP MAINTENANCE

Groups have to come from somewhere, and so it is useful for the conflict analyst to understand the origins of a group. This type of analysis is especially useful to those who are working in "Indications and Warning" or analysts who are looking at regions or situations that might spawn a new conflict group. Basically, a conflict group is born from individuals who belong to a quasi-group, who are made aware of their commonality by a trigger event and a charismatic, militant leadership. This is an important distinction that helps to explain why conflict groups are not generated from every poverty-stricken, oppressed society. Though grievances abound in the world, conflict groups cannot form without a true common link between people, a trigger event, and a charismatic militant leader.

Three more elements make it easier or more likely for a conflict group to form. The first is communication of the grievance to the group. This is accelerated through the use of mass media and the internet. The second is an element of legitimacy, which could be taken from religion, politics, or family ties, depending on the situation. Finally, it is necessary to have a weakened foe or at least the perception of a weakened foe.[19] A good example of the rise of a conflict group is the Global Jihad Movement. Originally the Al Qaeda group was quite small and confined to Afghanistan. Al Qaeda was formed after several attempts to overthrow authoritarian governments in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and elsewhere. Al Qaeda was fairly successful in fundraising and raising their profile among Muslims, but they needed more. First they identified a quasi-group or target audience that they defined as "Muslims everywhere." Secondly, they identified a grievance, a perpetrator, and a simple message: the United States was propping up authoritarian governments that were killing Muslims. Osama bin Laden next issued a religious "fatwa" proclaiming that it was a Muslim's religious duty to kill Americans everywhere in order to expel them from the Middle East. This lent legitimacy to the Al Qaeda campaign. Yet despite their efforts, Al Qaeda was frustrated that the large Muslim population around the world was not rising up and joining the jihad against America. Therefore they designed a trigger event to awaken the target group. This of course was the bombing of the World Trade Center on September, 11, 2001. The terrorist operation on 9/11 gave Al Qaeda what they needed: the image of a weakened foe. The fundraising

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[19] Pruitt and Kim, 2004, p. 24

started up again, and Al Qaeda was able to diversify its efforts and expand into what is today called the Global Salafi Jihad Movement.[20]

The practical result of the growth of the Salafi Jihad Movement is that law enforcement is dealing with little conflict groups around the world who all adhere to a similar pattern of grievance, perpetrator, and message, who in turn make up a larger, global conflict group. They are not geographically concentrated, but are rather bound together by a common issue: hatred of the United States. This illustration highlights that a conflict group does not have to have geographic, family, or religious ties, but requires only a quasi-group, a charismatic leader, and a trigger event. In this way, it is easier for an analyst to stay objective and resist falling into the trap of geographical or other biases.

We know now how group form, but what is it that keeps these groups going? How do the groups maintain their membership and hold their antagonistic attitudes over time? One useful concept that helps to explain the level of commitment of an individual to the group is rooted in individual and group psychology and is called *Total Social Identity*.[21] Total Social Identity is created by the process a group takes to identify its boundaries and maintain them through a process of outgroup derogation, ingroup bias, total loyalty to the group and self-imposed monitoring of thought. How does an individual subsume their identity to a group? Basically everyone belongs to many different groups and has many different identities.[22] The more identities one maintains,

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[20] See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism, revised edition*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006 for a similar analysis of the formation of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups; and Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004

[21] Black, Peter W. "Identities" in Cheldelin, Druckman, and Fast, Eds, *Conflict*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2003, p. 138

[22] A simple exercise to prove the point is to spend five minutes listing all the groups you belong to. This starts with your gender and perhaps ethnicity, and can move on to your state where you were born, your parents lineage and history, your school, profession, etc. Students were consistently able to generate about 20 or more identities in about five minutes.

the less likely an individual will be drawn into a conflict group. This makes logical

sense, because the number of groups one belongs to determines how interconnected one

is with the community. However, when conflict has destroyed the normal fabric of

society, limiting the number of cross-cutting groups available, or when a person begins to

limit the number of groups they identify with, they become more susceptible to

identifying with conflict groups.[23] In essence, the group norms and beliefs, approach to

the world, conflict style, etc. are "internalized" by the individual who takes on the group

identity as his or her own.

Now that we have developed an understanding of the basic ingredients of a core

conflict group, and looked at the level of commitment of the core members, we can layer

other related groups on top. The Onion Model, shown in Figure 6, is a useful reminder

that even if we think we are looking at a conflict group, there may be other groups that

are connected to the group that enhance its effectiveness.

INSERT FIGURE 6: THE ONION MODEL

The Onion Model shows different levels of control of the group as one travels

farther from the leadership. The leadership and immediate organization could be quite

small. For example, most terrorist groups have extremely small core groups or are even

organized in very small cells of only 2-3 people that may or may not be connected to a

larger organization. Outside of this core group are sympathizers who offer direct support,

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[23] Total Social Identity is a less severe form of the process used by cults to encourage an individual to shed their individual identity and transfer that identity to a group. One of the first studies on cults was Lifton, Robert Jay, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A study of brainwashing in China*, New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961

and outside of that circle is the larger quasi-group that the core group is trying to influence.

The Onion Model is particularly easy to use when looking at highly structured terror organizations. But in a more diffuse conflict environment, the model may not work as well. Therefore, another way of looking at conflict groups and conflict in general is by using Maire Dugan's Nested Conflict Model.[24] Shown in Figure 7, Dugan's model focuses not on the group itself, but on the issue, and embeds that in the relationship, which in turn is embedded in the subsystem, and yet again in a larger system.

INSERT FIGURE 7: NESTED CONFLICT MODEL

Dugan originally illustrated her idea with the example of a gang fight at a school. The issue may two boys fighting at school, but soon the principal discovers that the boys belong to gangs. The gangs in turn are embedded in a larger subsystem of the school environment, which in turn is embedded in the community. The principal will have minimal success in stopping fights in the school without also looking at the larger system surrounding the gang members. The Nested Conflict Model is an interesting way to try to place the origin or center of a conflict around an issue, rather than a group, which allows for more freedom in designing possible solutions to the conflict. This could be a key improvement in analyzing groups because frankly individual members, including leaders, may change more rapidly than the basic issues underlying the conflict in the first place.

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[24] Dugan, Maire, "A Nested Theory of Conflict" Women in Leadership 1, no. 1 (summer 1996); Dugan's model is also found in John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, p. 56

ESCALATION

The final section of the SSAGE framework takes all of the information collected heretofore, and puts it together into a dynamic model of change in conflict. As part of the overarching picture of a conflict, it is useful to locate where a conflict is on the Conflict Life Cycle, shown in Figure 8. The Conflict Life Cycle is a common tool used by so many conflict analysts that its source is unknown. The model shows how underlying "latent" conflict becomes "manifest," is eventually recognized as a crisis by external third parties, then escalates, becomes entrapped, and de-escalates.

INSERT FIGURE 8: CONFLICT LIFE CYCLE

The Conflict Life Cycle treats conflict as a wave, or a series of successive waves. The Life Cycle is easy to use and understand but can also be problematic. For example, the way the model is drawn suggests that de-escalation is the opposite of escalation, when the two processes are in reality very different. The Life Cycle also has a hard time portraying conflicts that escalate, become entrapped at a certain level, and then escalate again. In an attempt to find a better way to portray conflict escalation, analysts have developed several other models that can be useful.[25] The Aggressor-Defender model shows a one-way relationship in conflict between a powerful party that has decided for whatever reason to overpower another. This type of relationship could be illustrated by the 1980 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, by Iraq against Kuwait in 1991, or the United States against Iraq in 2003. So there are several examples of this type of

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[25] Pruitt and Kim, 2004, p. 92ff

conflict escalation. However, the aggressor-defender model does not adequately explain more complicated social conflict. For example, the Aggressor-Defender Model does not adequately explain the experience of the Soviets in Afghanistan or of the United States in Iraq. That is why many analysts prefer the Conflict Life Cycle or the Conflict Spiral to analyze conflict. The Conflict Spiral, shown in Figure 9, portrays the same dynamics of the Life Cycle only as a circle.

INSERT FIGURE 9: CONFLICT SPIRAL MODEL

The Life Cycle and Conflict Spiral models may be able to portray the up and down motion of a conflict, but they are unable to show why the conflict escalates or de-escalates. This problem is solved by Pruitt and Kim's (2004) *Structural Change Model*, which portrays the dynamic changes in conflict escalation as a structural change in one party or the other.[26] The model, shown in Figure 10, explains that a change within Party A causes it to apply conflict tactics and strategies against Party B, which in turn causes a structural change within Party B, which results in Party B applying conflict tactics and strategies to Party A, and so on.

INSERT FIGURE 10: STRUCTURAL CHANGE MODEL

Unfortunately, while the structural change model helps the analyst to understand that changes within a party cause a conflict to escalate, the model as explained by Pruitt and Kim focuses mainly on changes in individual and group psychology as a main

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[26] Pruitt and Kim, 2004, p. 102

impetus for conflict escalation and does not try to explain changes in situation or behavior. However, the author has attempted to improve Pruitt and Kim's model with the addition of key models already covered in the SSAGE framework. This *Modified Structural Change Model* helps to illustrate more clearly the specific nature of the change that leads to escalation.

The Modified Structural Change Model utilizes key models in the SSAGE Framework and links them to Johan Galtung's *Conflict Triangle Model*, which explains that all conflict involves a conflict situation, conflict attitudes, and conflict behavior. All three elements interact with each other, and the resolution of one without appropriate attention to the others will doom the intervention to failure.[27] While the model is widely accepted in the conflict analysis and resolution field, it is difficult for students to apply in practice. Therefore, in an effort to make the model more responsive, the author attached specific models to the conflict triangle in an attempt to "operationalize" it for the conflict analyst. Specifically, the conflict situation can be tracked by using the TRIP Model, which highlights changes to the goals and interests of the parties. The changing behavior of the group can be explained using the Dual Concern Model, which shows how conflict strategies and tactics are chosen based on a Party's concern for their own outcomes over their concern for the Other. Finally, conflict attitudes can be analyzed using the Lens Model, which shows the change over time in a party's image of self, other, and their relationship. The models assigned to the Conflict Triangle are portrayed in Figure 11.

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[27] Galtung, Johan, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*, Oslo, Norway: International Peace Research Institute, p. 72

INSERT FIGURE 11: MODELS ASSIGNED TO CONFLICT TRIANGLE

Now that the Conflict Triangle has been operationalized, it can in turn be imposed on the Structural Change Model, as shown in Figure 12. Now the analysis broadens from a focus on group psychology to larger changes in Situation, Attitudes, and Behavior.

INSERT FIGURE 12: MODIFIED STRUCTURAL CHANGE MODEL

This Modified Structural Change Model describes in much greater detail how the conflict situation, behaviors, and attitudes, work together to escalate conflict. Groups do not exist in isolation: they interact with other groups, as well as the conflict situation, which in turn help to generate unique conflict attitudes within the group. If the Modified Structural Change Model is used over time, in regular intervals or perhaps when there is a major event, a new party, change in leadership, etc., it will create a rich picture of the conflict in motion. In addition, the Modified Structural Change Model allows a conflict analyst to compare and contrast conflicts by focusing on the same data in each conflict. This could lead to a greater understanding of the dynamics of conflict across regions or situations.

Conclusion

The SSAGE Framework and the Modified Structural Change Model help the analyst to focus on important processes and relationships that underlie most social conflicts at a variety of levels and across geography and cultures. The Framework and

models should be easy to use by practitioners in the field as well as analysts on a

headquarters staff.

The SSAGE Framework and conflict mapping system can also be used to inform

conflict intervention choices. For example, the analysis of a conflict over time could

reveal that conflict attitudes have hardened and polarized a community to such an extent

that compromise on positions and goals is useless without a concerted effort to soften

black and white imaging of each side. Likewise, an analysis of the conflict behavior of

parties might reveal insight into the parties' views of the situation, as defined by the TRIP

model. For example, a party that treasures certain identity goals may be willing to fight

to the end, even if it means losing important tangible goals. These insights help an

analyst choose interventions more carefully with an eye to their eventual success. It

could also help to illuminate the sequence of intervention activities, by focusing not only

on creating change in behavior but also in attitudes in order to positively affect the

conflict situation.

One form of conflict resolution, the Problem-Solving Workshop, uses conflict

analysis as the core approach to resolving deep-rooted conflict between groups. In this

approach, an expert panel guides members of the conflict groups through a joint analysis

of the situation, behaviors, and attitudes that have perpetuated the conflict. The approach

targets mid-level parties from each side of the conflict who could potentially reach the

leadership as well as the grass-roots membership of the primary conflict parties. The

participants are brought together in a neutral location by conflict resolution professionals

in order to analyze the conflict together and search for solutions. This process is

explained fully by Chris Mitchell and Michael Banks (1996).[28] Versions of this approach are used all over the world at the international level as well as in smaller communities to help parties in conflict to understand what is happening. The approach is particularly useful for changing attitudes and increasing understanding between participants, but it has been less successful in changing the situation on the ground. However, it is a useful example of how conflict analysis in and of itself can be used as an intervention tool.

Though it constitutes only a part of the larger conflict resolution approach, conflict analysis is a neglected art that deserves more attention, resources, and credit than it receives currently. Most individuals, communities, and international players do not design their conflict interventions based on a comprehensive analysis of the conflict. Instead, many interventions are based on impulse, perception, and misguided assumptions. Why is it that more time and effort is not expended on a systematic assessment of the conflict? In some respects, analyzing conflict is too difficult; there are few established models, especially dynamic ones, that work for every conflict situation. This dearth of conflict analysis models and frameworks often leads to a haphazard and ad hoc approach to conflict analysis. More research must be conducted to fill the gaps and make the analysis of conflicts both more comprehensive and easier to conduct. It is hoped that the SSAGE Framework and associated models, as well as the Modified Structural Change Model will contribute to the search for better, more dynamic methods of conflict analysis.

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[28] Mitchell, Christopher, and Michael Banks, *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The analytical problem-solving approach*, London, UK: Pinter, 1996

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